



# NIHVFC Newsletter January 2005

*Contributing to global science development by building careers*

The NIHVFC is a self-governing body serving the interests of visiting fellows in their transition to life after the NIH by working to creating the opportunities for visiting fellows to maintain continuity in their research upon returning to their home countries.

Website - <http://felcom.nih.gov/NIHVFC>

Email - [NIHVFC@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIHVFC@mail.nih.gov)

## From the Editor:

Dear Visiting Fellows,

I hope you will enjoy reading the NIHVFC newsletters. We plan to publish them bi-monthly and will report on issues that would be of interest to visiting fellows at NIH. For example, in our previous newsletter, we had Dr. Donna L. Vogel briefly talking about various organizations that would help visiting fellows settle in nicely at NIH. In another report, Dr. Tirumalai Kamala detailed the prospects of doing clinical research in Vienna, Austria. We hope to publish similar reports in the future.

We also hope to have past visiting fellows share their experiences at NIH and their future plans. So, in this newsletter, we have Dr. Valéria de Mello-Coelho from Brazil, who is a founding member of NIHVFC and was actively involved from 2002 to 2004.

I would also welcome suggestions on how the newsletter can be improved to better serve the NIH Visiting Fellows community. Please email me at [ongh@mail.nih.gov](mailto:ongh@mail.nih.gov).

Sincerely,  
Dr. Hwei Ling Ong  
NIDCR/NIH

## Calling for contributions to the "In profile" segment

We are interested in profiling Visiting Fellows and Visiting Scientists who have completed their training at NIH and have either returned to their home countries or have started a new job outside NIH.

If you would like to contribute or you know someone else who would, please email your suggestions and contact details to me at [ongh@mail.nih.gov](mailto:ongh@mail.nih.gov).

**From the Chair of NIHVFC:**

Dear Visiting Fellows,

The NIHVFC is composed of NIH visiting fellows and operates as a self-governing body to improve the training experiences of visiting fellows at NIH. On behalf of the NIHVFC, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all visiting fellows for the new year. I would like to share with you our plans for the years 2003 – 2005 with the main aim of facilitating the smooth transition of visiting fellows, after completion of their training, from NIH, into their respective research fields.

For starters, the NIHVFC hopes to maintain strong institutional links between visiting fellows and NIH after the completion of their training. Currently, NIHVFC is working closely with the NIH Alumni Association to establish [NIH Alumni Association Chapters](#) in the visiting fellows' countries, with the aim of creating an Alumni Database of all present and past visiting fellows at NIH. These chapters will be under the sponsorship of a leading local scientific organization and will interact with other local bodies to facilitate the exchange of information on job and grant opportunities, and research collaborations. It is hoped that these local association chapters would help returning visiting fellows settle back into their countries, after spending some time abroad and also create a pool of mentors for current visiting fellows.

The NIHVFC is also working with all appropriate NIH partners to establish a [career development award](#) for visiting fellows, along the lines of the NIH K-22 grant already established for US citizens. Such an award would help visiting fellows to kick start their careers once they return home to their countries. The NIHVFC is also working with various NIH offices and the Division of International Services to increase the profiles of visiting fellows in their home countries. This would include the preparation of a press release, which will highlight the research and training activities undertaken by visiting fellows at NIH. With the support of a home country sponsor, we hope to disseminate the press release in local media outlets to coincide with the return of visiting fellows.

We are also working to create a [NIHVFC Seminar Series](#), which would increase NIHVFC's profile on campus and help us reach out to all visiting fellows on campus. We are looking for speakers with experience in developing post-graduate and research programs in various countries. The idea is to invite speakers to present their perspectives about career opportunities in the academia and industry for visiting fellows in their home country, and advice on overcoming obstacles and successfully developing independent research programs.

Finally, we are looking into organizing formal programs for visiting fellows to meet with [Visiting Scientists](#) from their countries when the latter visit NIH. This would involve liaising with the various program officers at the Fogarty International Center to contact the scientist, extend a formal invitation to meet the visiting fellows, and work out the logistics of the meeting. We would like to launch this program by initially working to arrange meetings between visiting fellows and visiting scientists who are currently on sabbatical at NIH.

I would like to encourage you to join us at our meetings ([first Friday of every month, 5pm at the Atrium Café next to the Cyber Lounge in Building 10](#)) and serve on our committee. Join us as we work together to make the most of our research and training experiences at NIH.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Tirumalai Kamala  
NIAID/NIH

## **In profile: Dr. Valéria Mello-Coelho (Brazil)**



Dr. Valéria de Mello-Coelho, a Biologist from Brazil, has been working on thymus research since 1991. She obtained her M.Sc. on the “Influence of pituitary hormones on thymus physiology” at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation. For her Ph.D. in Morphological Sciences, completed in 1997 at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, she continued working in the same domain of research under the supervision of Dr. Wilson Savino in Brazil and Drs. Mireille Dardenne and Marie Catherine Postel Vinay in Paris, France. In 1998, as an Associate Researcher at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, she wrote and won her first grant to study the “Influence of hormones on T cell homing to peripheral lymphoid organs”. During that period, Dr. Mello-Coelho supervised two Ph.D. students in Brazil and visited the laboratories of Dr. John J.T. Owen, in Birmingham, UK and Dr. Richard Boyd, in Australia, where she learned the techniques of fetal and reaggregate thymus organ cultures as well as intrathymic injection.

As Dr. Mello-Coelho was interested in the aging research, she joined the Laboratory of Immunology, headed by Dr. Dennis Taub, in the National Institute on Aging (NIA)/NIH in Baltimore by the end of 2000. Her main research interest was to understand the process of thymic involution during aging. Her work using cDNA microarrays and tissue arrays resulted in the discovery of a novel cell type in the aging thymus, the adipocytic multivacuolated mesenchymal cells. This work made Dr. Mello-Coelho one of the winners of the 2004 NIH Fellows Award for Research Excellence (FARE). Dr. Mello-Coelho also collaborated with other Visiting Fellows at the NIH in the domain of lipids, cancer and B-cell homing research. As a mentor, Dr Mello-Coelho supervised Allyson Bunbury, an undergraduate student from the Brooklyn College. Later Allyson returned to the NIA in the post-baccalaureate program under the tutelage of Dr. Mello-Coelho. Dr. Mello-Coelho said “I feel proud to have influenced Allyson to be an Immunologist. She was accepted as a PhD student at Albert Einstein College in NY this year, and I hope she continues to be enthusiastic and very successful in her career”.

In addition to her scientific activities, Dr Mello-Coelho was invited by the Scientific Director of the NIA, Dr. Dan Longo, to be the Fellow Representative (Basic Science Pathway) at the NIH Fellows Committee (FELCOM) in 2002. Serving on the FELCOM gave Dr. Mello-Coelho a breadth of experience and a deep realization as to how significantly NIH contributes to the development of independent scientists from all over the world. In 2002, Dr. Mello-Coelho and several other colleagues decided to form the NIH Visiting Fellows Committee (NIHVFC) in July of 2003. “This experience was unique and wonderful! We had tremendous support from the Fogarty International Center, especially from Dr. Sharon Hrynkow, and from several ICs to make NIHVFC a reality. Dr. Tirumalai Kamala was and still is the core of this committee. I sincerely hope all the efforts we have put into NIHVFC will facilitate the development of NIH visiting fellows as independent researchers when they return to their home countries” said Dr. Mello-Coelho.

In August 2004, Dr. Mello-Coelho left NIH to accept the position of Visiting Associate Professor at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Since then, she has maintained collaboration with her mentor Dr. Dennis Taub, at NIA, and with other principal investigators at NIH and in Brazil. Currently, Dr. Mello-Coelho’s main line of research involves understanding the biology of adipose tissue and its

## **In profile: Dr. Valeria Mello-Coelho (Brazil) *(continued)***

influence on the immune system. In Rio de Janeiro, she has been working mainly in collaboration with Dr. Radovan Borojevic, who is an expert in stem cell and bone marrow physiology. In this context, with the collaboration of Dr. Taub, Dr. Mello-Coelho brought in Alex Balduino, a Ph.D. student under the main supervision of Dr. Borojevic at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, to develop part of his thesis on the “Global gene expression analysis of mesenchymal stem cell populations” in the Laboratory of Immunology at NIA in 2004. Dr. Mello-Coelho is a co-supervisor for Alex, who will be returning to Brazil in February 2005 to complete his thesis. Finally, one of the main projects in the agenda of the NIHVFC is the creation of the local NIH Alumni Association Chapters in other countries. Dr. Mello-Coelho is actively involved in the formation of a chapter in Brazil. “For the future I intend to continue doing research on the field of immunology and adipocyte biology, as well as to work in the academia to be a positive influence in the formation of new young scientists. Science is art. I love what I do and I am very happy that I had had the opportunity to live all these experiences at NIH” said Dr. Mello-Coelho.

### **Canada-HOPE Scholarship Program**

This scholarship program is aimed at enabling promising individuals from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, to be mentored by prominent Canadian researchers.

Deadline for full application: March 1, 2005

For more information, please follow the link to the scholarship program homepage from the NIHVFC website:

[http://felcom.nih.gov/NIHVFC/WHATS\\_NEW.html](http://felcom.nih.gov/NIHVFC/WHATS_NEW.html)

